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***The Virgin and the 'Whore' – an Interreligious Challenge for our times:
Exploring the Politics of Religious *Belonging* with Tamar***

*About three months later Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution, and as a result she is now pregnant."
Judah said, "Bring her out and have her burned to death." (Genesis 38:24)*

"A 19-year-old woman has been sentenced to death in Pakistan after she accused her cousin of raping her at gunpoint... The panchayat, which included the alleged rapist's father, then found her guilty of adultery and declared her a Kari, or adulteress."¹

"The nun no longer goes to confession regularly, after an Italian priest forced himself on her while she was at her most vulnerable...recounting her sins to him in a university classroom nearly 20 years ago."²

Polarised perceptions of women as pure or impure, chaste or unchaste, virgin or 'slut', Madonna or 'whore', have been used to humiliate, shame, and control the bodies of women throughout the centuries. Such dichotomous thinking is embedded within religious ideologies where Holy Scriptures have been used in order to create the sociological frameworks that enable women's identities to be manipulated into patriarchal constructions of womanhood. This is most visible in the idealisation of the Virgin Mary and the demonization of the 'original sinner' and 'temptress', Eve. As patriarchal theologising has determined that these female figures become the Biblical foundation on which the Church can embed a fear in the sexuality and independence of women, maintaining that if a woman is not to remain a virgin then she must be married, domesticated and subject to her husband.³ Such religious ideologies that have been espoused throughout history are politically motivated and work towards enabling the subjugation of women through a politics of shame, where women either belong or un-belong to religious institutions dependent upon whether or not they remain within the boundaries of 'decency' that have been imposed upon them. The religious '*un-belongers*', become the '*whores*' those whose presence offends the religious ruling classes whose moral agenda is not being met. The Eves, the Tamars, the Rahabs, the concubines, the witches, the lesbians, and the

¹ "Raped Pakistan woman sentenced to death by stoning for adultery" available online: https://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c_id=2&objectid=11866690 (accessed on: 06.07.2019)

² Nicole Winfield, "After decades of silence, nuns talk about abuse by Priests", available online: <https://apnews.com/f7ec3cec9a4b46868aa584fe1c94fb28> (accessed on: 06.07.2019).

³ See Luther's argument that as a woman must be married as "this happened because of God's gracious will so that she stays under her husband's rule, because she is too weak to rule her herself D. Martin Luther's, *sammtliche Werke*, (Erlangen and Frankfurt, 1826-57), 33, 127. The dangers of the church prioritising the sanctity of marriage over above the agency of the woman are noted by the Indian feminist theologian, Aruna Gnanadasan, who states, "our concerns have been the sanctity of the family, reconciliation, restoring marriages, when often the first need is for an end to violence, for safety for women and children, and for justice for the oppressed." See, Aruna Gnanadasan, *No Longer a Secret: The Church and Violence against Women*, (Geneva: WCC Press, 1997), 43.

rebels. As the boundaries of religious belonging are often based upon essentialist patriarchal conceptions of 'decency' and morality that have been shaped into doctrine and those who are deemed 'indecent' are marginalised to locations of struggle and often met with violence. Such is the case that these women present an interreligious challenge for our time.

This paper will explore the gendered politics of religious belonging through an intersectional lens, noting that "we cannot homogenise the ways any political project or claimings affect people who are differentially located within the same boundaries of belonging."⁴ It will focus on Christianity as this is the faith in which my own identity is routed and has shaped my interdisciplinary analysis. By exploring the *Virgin/Whore* dichotomy in Christianity it will outline the gendered politics of belonging where the religious identity of women is determined by the hegemonic systems that have created ideological boundaries intended to control the bodies of women. It will then look to the narrative of Tamar and Judah in the book of Genesis, where prostitution, Levirate marriage, widowhood, child birth, ethnicity, honour-killing, and sexual desires, shape the text and force the reader to confront questions of 'morality', justice and the politics of religious be-longing. As Tamar goes from virgin, to wife, to widow, to betrothed, to prostitute, to righteous... I will therefore seek to challenge the legitimacy of a gendered politics of religious belonging that forces women to live within the realms of the 'virgin' when it is in playing the 'whore' that women can achieve ultimate religious belonging and a passionate relationship with God.

The Politics of Religious Belonging

To belong to Christianity is premised on a belief in Christ, however the ways in which that belief is lived out by individuals or groups is to a large degree determined by the extent to which the individual feels as though they *belong* in the religious group. Therefore lived religious belonging is complex, as it forces us to consider the multiple experiences of the individual *believer* in their quest to achieve a "feeling of being at home."⁵ The politics of religious belonging is therefore determined by multiple boundaries as each believer is affected by their social, economic, and political location. The boundaries are what controls ones authenticity in the fixed notion of belonging, because as Yuval-Davis remarks, the politics of belonging involves "the dirty work of boundary maintenance,"⁶ such boundaries she notes, "sometimes physically, but always symbolically, separate the world population into 'us' and 'them'."⁷ This is visible in the colonial imagery where the indigenous subjects are degraded and subjugated and in situations of religious oppression where the boundaries of class, gender, caste, ethnicity and nationality are used as a means of imposing a hierarchy of *believers*. The physical and symbolic boundaries of belonging in the politics of religion can be constructed in a way that present women as the 'thems', the 'others', and the 'unbelongers', such boundaries strengthen and enable unequal social relations and therefore access to power. This is visible in the history of Christianity where, as Lavinia Byrne notes, "the problem for women is that the Christian tradition has been less open to human differences than the Gospels are; the tradition

⁴ Nira Yuval-Davis, "Power, Intersectionality and the Politics of Belonging", *FREIA* Department of Culture & Global Studies: Aalborg University, Denmark (2011): 7.

⁵ The complexity of notions of political belonging is also related to a need to intimately belong, this can be described as emotive belonging in order to achieve a "sense of self", see, Eva Youkhana, "A Conceptual Shift in Studies of Belonging and the Politics of Belonging", *Social Inclusion*, Vol. 3. Issue 4, (2015): 10-24,12.

⁶ Nira Yuval-Davis, "Belonging and the Politics of the Belonging", in *Patterns of Prejudice*, 40, 3. (2006): 197-214, 204.

⁷ Nira Yuval-Davis, "Power, Intersectionality and the Politics of Belonging": 3.

has thought it necessary to set up half of the human family at the expense of the other...one consequence is that, as women, we have been forced to define our identity in ways that lead us to deny that identity.”⁸ Women have had to navigate and negotiate their faith belonging throughout the history of the Church, they have been told to stay silent (1 Timothy 2.11-14), to know ones place, to feel guilty for the sins of their sex, and to feel shame for their bodies.⁹

As shame is foundational to the lived reality of existing within the boundaries of the politics of religious belonging, where the *belonger* is often forced into a state of *un-belonging* as a consequence of patriarchal hegemonic religiosity that has constructed a moral order used to police bodies. The boundaries of shame create an environment of exclusion and vulnerability for the believer whose religious identity is often scrutinised, challenged or denied. Women and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, and all those who dare to challenge normative constructions of sexuality and morality are often those who are most commonly punished and pushed into a state of religious *un-belonging*. In agreement with Sally Munt, “spaces become loci of shame but also shame itself enacts a space, a system that facilitates the formation of identity while also regulating it, thus locating the force of its control in and on the body itself.”¹⁰ As ‘shame’ has conditioned us to think and act in certain ways, and as Alexis Shotwell remarks, it “feels as though it is part of our body and our being.”¹¹ When a politics of shame is imposed on the religious believer the body of the individual becomes dislocated, in the quest for authenticity the theologies that have created the boundaries push them to either rebel against the dominant epistemologies or deny their very being.

It is in situations of rebellion that the boundary breakers become political agents in the hope of gaining empowerment. This can be witnessed in the liberationist and postcolonial theology movements, where androcentric, heteronormative theologies, that have shaped the socio-political power relations of religiosity, are being challenged. Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza also makes note of the boundary breakers within Scripture, stating, “like the Syro-Phoenicia who enters the house where Jesus stays and breaks through the cultural ‘masculine’ tendency to separate and isolate, to draw exclusive boundaries, so women have entered the house of theological education...”¹² Religious belonging is therefore also impacted by the extent to which the *believer* has access to power, if women have historically been informed that only men are made in the image of God – it ultimately affects the religious identity of the individual, as throughout history “not only could women not represent God to the Christian community, they could not represent the generically human – before God or before the community.”¹³ As such, one of the most important “political

⁸ Lavinia Byrne, *Women Before God*, (London: SPCK, 1988), 7.

⁹Power in relation to religious belonging is visibly determined by gender. as it remains the case that women in the Roman Catholic church are not permitted to be ordained, and it is only in recent history that women in Protestant denominations have entered the Priesthood.

¹⁰ Sally Munt, *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame* (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2007), x.

¹¹ Alexis Shotwell, “Negative Affect and Whiteness” in *Knowing Otherwise: Race, Gender, and Understanding* (Penn State Press, 200), 94.

¹² Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 168.

¹³ See, Margaret Farley, “Moral Imperatives for the Ordination of Women,” in *Women and Catholic Priesthood: An Expanded Version*, ed. Anne Marie Gardiner (New York:: Paulist Press, 1976), 40-41.

projects of belonging”¹⁴ within Christianity is the dichotomising discourse of women, apparent most explicitly in the ‘the virgin’ and ‘the whore’ dichotomy.

The Virgin and the Whore: An Interreligious Challenge

The assumed supremacy of male theologies, androcentric dogmatics, and gendered socio-political norms have determined that women are of lesser worth religiously, socially, politically and economically. Consequently religion has been used to justify violence against women in the form of honour killings, forced marriages, domestic violence, rape, and infanticide. The bodies of women have throughout history been mocked, patronised, abused, forced into silence, degraded, violated and shamed. And through an intersectional lens it becomes visible of the extent to which some women’s narratives carry more enforced ‘shame’ than others, as women have been subjected to dichotomous hierarchies in order to sustain discourses of hegemonic power – be it patriarchy, colonialism, racism and capitalism. The socio-religious and cultural masculinities that enact such violence are often expressed through patriarchal control of a woman’s sexuality through whatever measures deemed necessary. Religion has played a key role in the systemic frameworks that have enabled such violence to occur, where constructs of femininity have been polarised in terms of the chaste and the unchaste, the decent and the indecent, the virgin and the whore.

The Virgin/Whore dichotomy has been much discussed in psychoanalytic literature and often overlooked in our interreligious theologising, and yet this dichotomy is ingrained within much of our religious thinking – noting as Tumanov states, that the first woman in the Hebrew Bible, Eve, has come to be understood as the “embodiment of the whore,”¹⁵ where Eve who is said to have “seduced Adam” is considered “more bitter than death.”¹⁶ The virgin/whore dichotomy has been reinforced and sanctioned by religious powers, notable also in the “colonial imaginary”, where postcolonial feminists have highlighted how the colonialists imposed the “insidious dichotomy” in order to polarise the “decent” western woman and “the superstitious, demonized native woman.”¹⁷ Hill-Collins notes how the imagery of Jezebel was used under slavery in order to portray Black women as being “sexually aggressive”, as Jezebel’s “function was to regulate all Black women to the category of sexually aggressive women, thus providing a powerful rationale for the widespread sexual assaults by White men.”¹⁸ The process of the ‘othering’ of women has been used throughout the world religions, where female transgression is depicted in terms of ‘whoredom’ and ‘harlotry’ and often supported through Scriptural narratives that profess gender based violence which is perpetrated by Holy men and granted divine mandate (Leviticus 20:13; Deut 22:23-29). These texts prescribe punishments used throughout the centuries for women who do not conform to patriarchal ideologies, and against those who do not adhere to heteronormative sexualities – thus forcing

¹⁴ Nira Yuval-Davis, “Power, Intersectionality and the Politics of Belonging”: 7.

¹⁵ Vladimir Tumanov, “Mary Versus Eve: Paternal Uncertainty and the Christian View of Women”, *Neophilologus* (2011) 95: 507-521, 507.

¹⁶ See, Henrich, Kraemer’ Sprenger, Jakob, *Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Montague Summers, (London: Arrow Books, 1971).

¹⁷ See, Irene Lara, “Goddess of the Américas in the Decolonial Imaginary: Beyond the Virtuous Virgin/Pagan Puta Dichotomy”, *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1/2, The Chicana Studies Issue (Spring - Summer, 2008): 99-127, 99.

¹⁸ Hill Collins (1979), 82.

people to deny their very being – because as is too often the case, their very being may ultimately lead to violence, enacted through honour killings, rapes, domestic abuse, silencing, and ‘slut-shaming’, thereby creating a politics of religious be-longing and un-belonging. Central to such ideologies is the power of patriarchy, where sexual purity has, as McClintock suggests, “emerged as a controlling metaphor for racial, economic and political power.”¹⁹

Such espoused religious ideologies are not lost in the chapters of our religious histories but are very much apparent in the context of today – where the dangers of such dichotomous thinking are visible in the global political arena and the repercussions played out in local situations of violence against women. As we live in the age of Donald Trump, the President of the USA, who the won the vote of the majority of Protestant Christians and white Catholics²⁰, and says of women, to “Grab’ em, by the pussy, you can do anything.”²¹ The President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has described a childless woman, as a “half person”, stating that a “woman who rejects motherhood, who refrains from being around the house...is deficient, is incomplete.”²² The Prime Minister of the UK has referred to Muslim women as “letter boxes” and “bank robbers”, leading to a rise in islamophobia and hate crimes against women.²³ Thus dichotomising boundaries are imposed on to the bodies of women, where women’s worth in a political system of belonging is determined by their appearance, their womb, their ethnicity and their religion.²⁴ The virgin/whore dichotomy is embedded in all patriarchal societies and has been ideologically supported through a theology that serves to control the bodies of women intrinsic to the dominant politics of religious belonging. According to Marcella Althaus-Reid, it is for reason that empowerment through the imagery of the Virgin is “a short circuit”, she states, “in worshipping Mary women need to go through a spiritual clitoridectomy, in the sense of mutilating their lust, in order to identify with the Virgin, get her approval of their behaviour and never question the social and political order built around such religious ideology.”²⁵

The virgin/whore dichotomy therefore presents an interreligious challenge for our time, as in agreement with Paul Knitter, “unless religions are part of the solution, they will continue to be part

¹⁹ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather. Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 47.

²⁰ It is important to differentiate between White Catholic and Hispanic Catholic, as the majority of Hispanic Catholics voted for Clinton, as did the Jewish population, and those belonging to other faiths. See, Pew Research, “Presidential vote by religious affiliation and race”, available online: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/ft_16-11-09_relig_exitpoll_religrace/ (Accessed, 10.08.2019).

²¹ See, “Transcript: Donald Trump’s Comments About Women”, available online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/08/us/donald-trump-tape-transcript.html>

²² Hillary Margolis, “17 times politicians have resorted to wildly sexist speech over the last year”, available online: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/13/17-times-politicians-have-resorted-wildly-sexist-speech-over-last-year> (Accessed on: 12.06.2019)

²³ Natalie Gil, “A brief history of our new Prime Minister’s most sexist & homophobic comments”, available online: <https://www.refinery29.com/en-gb/2019/06/236014/boris-johnson-sexist> (Accessed on: 04.08.2019).

²⁴ This has become increasingly apparent in Europe where binary constructions of women are being reinforced, Muslim women in particular are experiencing intense social scrutiny and marginalisation from both men and women as a result of preconceived judgments shaped by western identity politics. See, Janine Dahinden, Kerstin Duemmler & Joelle Moret, “Disentangling Religious, Ethnic and Gendered Contents in Boundary Work: How Young Adults Create the Figure of ‘The Oppressed Muslim Woman’”, *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 35, Issue 4, (2004): 329-348.

²⁵ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 49.

of the problem...to be part of the solution religions must confront why they are part of the problem.”²⁶ Our Holy Scriptures can serve as ‘weapon’ to legitimise problems – inclusive of violence against women, or can serve as a lens through we can see an alternative way of being and become part of the solution. It is for this reason that the story of Tamar and Judah in Genesis 38 is of particular interest, as it can serve as a means of critiquing the dominant patriarchal discourses that continue to be used to subjugate the bodies of women. The narrative tells the tale of Tamar and Judah, where prostitution, Levirate marriage, widowhood, child birth, ethnicity, honour-killing, and sexual desires, shape the text and force the reader to confront questions of ‘morality’, justice and the politics of religious belonging.

Tamar and Judah – a narrative of religious ‘belonging’

The story of Tamar and Judah has been described by biblical exegetes as being both complex and ‘problematic’.²⁷ It narrates the journey of Tamar, who is given to Er the firstborn of Judah as his wife. Er dies, reportedly as a result of his sinful ways, thus making Tamar a widow. As she did not give birth to a son under Levirate law she is required to have intercourse with Judah’s second born son, Onan. Onan though “practiced premature withdrawal to prevent impregnation” and he too was put to death by God. Judah was then obligated under Levirate law to marry Tamar off to his third and youngest son, however Judah denies Tamar this right, and Tamar returns to her fathers house as a childless widow, where she remained for a long time (38:11), until she heard that her father-in-law, Judah, was passing by, and so she went in disguise, “covered herself with a veil” sat outside the temple entrance and having “took her for a whore”, Judah asked to have sex with her, in exchange he promised to “send a kid from the flock” to her, but not trusting his word, she asked for a pledge until she received it, and asked for his “seal and cord and staff” (38:17). When Judah discovered that there was no “cult-harlot” he was embarrassed. Later finding out that his daughter-in-law, Tamar, was pregnant, and accused of “playing the whore” (38:24), Judah called for her and the unborn child to be burned to death (38:24). It is at this point that Tamar reveals that the owner of the seal-and-cord and staff is the father of her unborn child. And consequently Judah, realising his seed continues, declares her as righteous (38:26).

The story interrupts the narrative of Joseph, with Biblical exegetes making assumptions of seemingly “poor composition,”²⁸ and Walter Brueggemann noting that “it is difficult to know in what context it may be of value for theological exposition.”²⁹ Yet this is a text that is passionately theological as it brings to light a woman’s lived faith journey, embedded within a patriarchal world that is entrenched within an ideology that seeks to control her body. From the beginning of this pericope Judah’s religious belonging is situated in his marriage to a Canaanite woman, this would be a “discredited choice for Abraham’s descendants”³⁰, yet “each sexual intercourse of Judah with his

²⁶ Paul Knitter, “Challenges of Interreligious and Intercultural Cooperation Today”, *Political Theology* 13:4, (2012): 397-399, 397.

²⁷ See, Randy L. Maddox, “Damned if you do and Damned if you Don’t: Tamar – A Feminist Foremother, Genesis 38:6-26” *Daughters of Sarah* (July 1987): 14.

²⁸ Judah Goldin, “The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 96, No. 1. (Mar. 1977): 27-44.

²⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 308.

³⁰ Rachel Adelman, “Seduction and Recognition in the Story of Judah and Tamar and the Book of Ruth” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues* No. 23. (2012): 87-109.

wife in the narrative constitutes procreation.”³¹ Thus continuing the lineage, and cementing his masculinity and religious identity. In contrast his son Er, who as Esther Marie Menn notes, “becomes the passive object of divine evaluation”, accused of being sinful, he is “eliminated by God from the narrative.”³² The purpose of marriage as being routed in procreation is a key aspect of societal notions of belonging, where as Abasili notes, “the social worth of the spouses flows from and depends on the idea of procreation...begetting children, therefore, is a social and religious duty attached to marriage and is central to it.”³³ The virgin/whore dichotomy is instantly apparent within the text as Tamar takes on the role of the submissive Virgin wife, she is dutifully married off to Er, yet as the *kallatu* (bride), she “does not just belong to the bridegroom but she is the bride of the head of the family or of the whole family,”³⁴ according to Levirate law. It is for this reason that upon the death of Er, Judah passes the responsibility of procreating the offspring of his brother to Onan. Abasili notes that “according to Deut 25, 5- 10, the brother-in-law in question is to marry his deceased brother’s widow and the first child of the marriage is to bear his deceased brother’s name “so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel” (see Deut 25, 5-6). Nonetheless, there is room for the brother-in-law to reject this duty to his brother, although he must endure public ridicule in return (Deut 25, 7-8).”³⁵ Therefore the politics of shame is central to the text, as the man who is unable to continue the lineage of his brother will be communally humiliated, therefore outlining the hegemony of masculinity that produces a toxic masculinity. As it is the competing demand for men to act in a certain way and produce results that ultimately leads to violence against women, as we later witness in the exile of Tamar and the demand from Judah to have her burnt alive when news spreads of her supposedly ‘playing the whore’.³⁶ Such notions of masculinity are central aspects of the politics of religious belonging as historic understandings of hegemonic masculinity place emphasis on matters of sexuality. Visible in Onan’s spilling of his ‘seed’ which ultimately leads to his death as divinely sanctioned punishment, this is because he has been sexually humiliated, in doing so he has brought shame on his family. For Briggs this “demonstrates the feminisation of a man....whether through the man’s loss of sexual agency or the loss of control over his family’s sexuality.”³⁷

The text also speaks of the reality of boundary maintenance within Judah and Tamar’s religious society, where order is maintained through marriage and law, as Susan Niditch describes, “an important thematic thread of the narrative deals with the question of the stability and health of Israelite social structure. This theme tells us something about the categories or classifications by

³¹ Alexander I. Abasili, “Seeing Tamar through the Prism of an African Woman: A Contextual Reading of Genesis 38” *OTE* 24/3 (2011): 555-573, 557

³² Esther Marie Menn, *Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis: Studies in Literary Form and Hermeneutics* (New York: Brill, 1997), 20.

³³ Abasili, “Seeing Tamar,” *OTE* 24/3 (2011): 558.

³⁴ Marten Stol, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (De Gruyter, 2016), 296.

³⁵ See, Alexander Izuchukwu Abasili, “Genesis 38: The Search for Progeny and Heir,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament: An International Journal of Nordic Theology* 25:2 (2011): 276-288, 280.

³⁶ Toxic masculinity can be witnessed in the performative narrative of the hegemonic males within the text, where there appear to be competing masculinities within a given culture and the fear of being communally humiliated. See, R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the concept”, *Gender and Society* 19 (2005): 829-58.

³⁷ Will Briggs, “A Man’s Gotta Do What a Man’s Gotta do: The Criticism of Hegemonic Masculinity in Judges 19.1-20.7,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Vol. 42.1 (2017): 51:71, 59.

which order is maintained and the fabric of society strengthened.”³⁸ Wanting to maintain the structure of his family, Judah prevents Tamar from marrying his youngest son, and Tamar returns to her father’s house, “her action depicts a childless widow who has no other legal option than to obey her father-in-law’s command.”³⁹ The Hebrew word used here to describe Tamar is *almanah*, according to Rook, this refers to “a woman peripheral to the kinship group, without male representation or guardianship.”⁴⁰ Thus Tamar is dislocated from the community, she exists now on the boundaries of society as a widowed religious *un-belonger*.

Tamar however uses her body in order to resist her marginalised status, she must take on the role of the ‘whore’ in order to survive, according to Biblical scholars, she tricks Judah into sexual intercourse, who was as Phyllis Bird describes, is likely to be ‘sexually starved’ after the death of his wife.⁴¹ Apparent within the narrative is the agency of Tamar, as she “subverts her status as a passive object for sex by claiming the role of a prostitute.”⁴² This has led Thomas Mann to state that “probably never – or never up till then – did a woman love and desire a man so entirely apart from his own sake and so entirely for the sake of an idea as Tamar loved Judah.”⁴³ Tamar seduces Judah at the entrance to Enaim, named *petah ‘enayim*, which can translate from the Hebrew as “the opening of the eyes”, Aderman notes the irony of this name as Judah fails to recognise his veiled daughter-in-law.⁴⁴ Perhaps the author though wants us to see the irony of the role that Tamar is playing in subverting the system that has dislocated her to the boundaries of society, and forced her to act as a prostitute on the road side. The politics of her belonging is still very much controlled by the virgin/whore dichotomy apparent within the politics of her socio-religious belonging, as in her role as virgin she was she punished and oppressed for the acts of her husbands, now though she must risk the charge of adultery in order to survive.⁴⁵ The Hispanic feminist theologians Isasi-Díaz and Tarango, make this point, noting that “survival has to do with more than barely living. Survival has to do with the struggle to be fully. To survive one has to have ‘the power to decide one’s history and one’s vocation or historical mission.’”⁴⁶ At this point Tamar’s only means of power was in her body, her sexuality enables her to have the knowledge and energy to bring about personal and social change.

³⁸ Susan Niditch, “The Wronged Woman Righted: An Analysis of Genesis 38,” *Harvard Theological Review* 72, no. 2 (1979): 143-149: 144.

³⁹ Alexander Izuchukwu Abasili, “Genesis 38: The Search for Progeny and Heir,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament: An International Journal of Nordic Theology* 25:2 (2011): 282.

⁴⁰ See, Sandra Ladick Collins, *Weapons Upon Her Body: The Female Heroic in the Hebrew Bible*, (), 61.

⁴¹ Phyllis Bird, “The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts,” *Semeia* 46 (1989): 119-139, 123.

⁴² Ananya Malhotra, “Genesis’ Tamar: The Bible’s Most Sex-Positive Feminist?”, *Womanifesto*, available online: <https://womanifestosite.wordpress.com/2016/11/07/genesis-tamar-the-bibles-most-sex-positive-feminist-by-ananya-malhotra-20/> (Accessed on: 12.08.2019).

⁴³ Thomas Mann, *Joseph and His Brothers*, IV: *Joseph the Provider* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944), 314.

⁴⁴ Rachel Aderman, *Seduction and Recognition in the Story of Judah and Tamar and the Book of Ruth*: 93.

⁴⁵ Walton notes that “it was a fact of life and society that sometimes widows were forced into prostitution (either regular or occasional) in order to live. Yet it was still unacceptable behaviour and was treated severely. The punishment of burning is rare and reserved for the most serious of sexual crimes.” See, John H. Walton, *Genesis*, (epub: Zondervan, 2016).

⁴⁶ See, Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz and Yolanda Tarango, *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), 4.

After sex with Judah she removes her veil and returns to wearing her widow's clothing, this is symbolic of the "counterpoints in the transition from widow to harlot and back again, from a private, masked identity to a social role, from mis-recognition to public disclosure."⁴⁷ Thus she subverts and resists the system, and when Judah needs the 'whore' who has his signet, cord and staff, the power remains in Tamar's hands, she had been shamed, now Judah must resist societal shaming. Tamar calls on Judah to "please recognise these", she gives him a choice that he never gave her, and a voice that she never had at the time when he was willing to have her burned to death, but now she speaks, and "he must recognise his responsibility toward Tamar, whom he now admits to having neglected by not giving her to his son Shelah (Gen. 38.26)."⁴⁸ The response from Judah is an admittance that he has wronged her and that she is righteous, and so it is that the 'harlot' and 'seductress' on the boundaries of society brings about socio-political change. Frymer-Kensky describes how "the woman who transformed the history of the kingdom of Judah also transformed Judah himself."⁴⁹ In doing so she also challenges the image of passive motherhood that is so ingrained in the Christian legacy, which is perhaps why Walter Bruggeman could not see the theological potential of the text.

Tamar's display of power is of significant importance as her bodily power becomes a resource to resist an oppressive patriarchal system that would have seen her and her unborn child burned alive for a display of unconfined sexuality. This could be described as "power at its best", as Yuval-Davis notes, "without power as a resource to, at least, resist if not affect positive change, the normative values of care and love of feminist 'ethics of care' can have very little social and political influence."⁵⁰ Tamar here represents a redistribution of power – where she gains enough power to bring about change and for Judah to acknowledge his sins. For Tribble, such theological dramas enable us to witness "women working out their own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in them." Such dramas though continue to be enacted, women still struggle to survive, and to belong, what is needed is a movement, an uprising of Tamars, not Tamar as virgin or widow, but Tamar as 'whore', in order to gain sufficient power to bring about social transformation.

Conclusion

In agreement with Yuval-Davis, "power, in order to be effective in the long term, has to be internalized and naturalized."⁵¹ Those who have been pushed to the boundaries of their religious belonging, must be given the power to live out their faith without the fear of violence. In order to do so we need to leave behind the theologising that never tires of talking of the welfare of mankind whilst justifying the condemnation and oppression of women and all who exist outside of the hegemonic normalising gaze. Because such theologising has done little to help the women who are violently raped, trafficked, forced into sex work, beaten, abused, violated and downtrodden. It has instead enabled and enforced a patriarchal religiosity that has for centuries forced women to "stay silent" and "know our place". What is needed is a

⁴⁷ Rachel Aderman, *Seduction and Recognition in the Story of Judah and Tamar and the Book of Ruth*: 94.

⁴⁸ Ibid: 94.

⁴⁹ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken, 2002), 275.

⁵⁰ Yuval-Davis, "Power, Intersectionality and the Politics of Belonging": 8.

⁵¹ Nira Yuval-Davis, "Power, Intersectionality and the Politics of Belonging", in *The Palgrave Handbook of Gender and Development* eds. W. Harcourt (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 378.

theological project that challenges the politics of religious belonging, it must intersect the borders and boundaries of class, caste, gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion and ability, in order to be true to the lived experiences of God's people. Such a theologising must be born of 'whores', those who have been forced to the periphery of their religious belonging, because they do not adhere to the normative confines of the hegemonic politics of their religion.

A politics of religious belonging that is contemplated from the body of the 'whore' is transformative, not reformatory. It challenges the economy of greed and refuses to accept it, it is shaped by a praxis of resistance and demands an 'allness' that does not patiently wait for a kingdom to come, but demands that promised kin-dom in the here and now. A religious belonging that like Tamar wears the veil of 'indecent' in order to shame the systems of oppression and be righteous before God. It is not apathetic to the suffering of the marginalised but demands the church must 'own' the atrocities it has committed against women in order to live out a catholicity that is truly on the side of the downtrodden, as such it must be born out of the experiences of those it has marginalised. The so-called 'whore' then becomes the mouthpiece of a new reality in action, her life, pathos, words, struggles and resistance become an invitation to Christ, as she becomes the hope for a new reality and demands that we join her in the struggles. In doing so heteronormative constructions of religious belonging can be challenged, and this can lead to "mobilizing people in popular resistance campaigns as well as determining to a great extent a global system of stratification."⁵² Our Scriptures teach us that it is the *unbelongers* who God takes the side of, it is they who become the political insurgents, resisting the symbolic orders, and bringing about change.

⁵² Nira Yuval-Davis, "Power, Intersectionality and the Politics of Belonging", *FREIA* Department of Culture & Global Studies: Aalborg University, Denmark (2011): 6.